

and deprivation from their dignities and benefices." She was especially angry with some of the more moderate bishops for countenancing "the prophesyings," or assemblies for discussion and edification which had come into vogue in nearly every diocese. The ministers of a district would meet on certain days to expound a text and debate some point of doctrine under the presidency of a moderator appointed by the bishop. Such discussions were an admirable means of stimulating thought and training the clergy in public speaking, but it savoured too much of innovation and license to find favour with a ruler to whom formality was an essential of religion. She gave strict injunctions to Archbishop Parker to suppress "these vain prophesyings." The utmost limit of theological teaching which she would permit the clergy was to read one of the prescribed homilies from the pulpit. Independent preaching could only lead to heresy and confusion. To the Puritan, on the other hand, preaching was the grand essential of public worship. It was the nurse of intellectual and spiritual life, and was infinitely preferable to the official formalism which constituted her majesty's religion. It was a much-needed antidote to the intellectual and spiritual dulness which the precise observance of certain prescribed attitudes and formalities tends to induce. Uniformity may be necessary in an army, and an army is an admirable machine in its way. But an army does not reason, does not initiate, and a Church modelled after the pattern of the conventional military machine is apt to stagnate, whether its form be presbyterian or episcopal. Form is essential to life, but it is the life that is nevertheless the essential thing. And certainly there was more life in the impassioned Puritan sermon, with all its extravagance, than in the prescribed homily. The Puritan sermons gave a new impulse, intellectual as well as spiritual, to the age in its own fashion; and the age, which had for long slumbered in the atmosphere of priestly formulary, was at last beginning to yawn and stretch its stiffened members.

These prophesyings, which offended Elizabeth as  
nurseries  
of insubordination, were not necessarily the fruit  
of a recalci-  
trant spirit. Many of those who frequented  
them were not  
even Puritans. They went to these meetings  
because they